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Are U.S. Officials Covering for Andropov?

Rep. Larry McDonald (D.-Ga.) has called on President Reagan, CIA Director William Casey and the Congress to investigate charges that U.S. officials have discouraged American journalists and Italian authorities from investigating Soviet involvement in the plot to murder Pope John Paul II.

The charges were made by NBC correspondent Marvin Kalb at the end of an updated repeat of the program, "The Man Who Shot the Pope: A Study in Terrorism," which aired January 25. Kalb said CIA officials were trying to cover up the matter because evidence of KGB involvement in the plot would "shatter hopes for detente, trade and arms agreements" with the Soviets.

But the evidence, developed by NBC television, *Reader's Digest*, and the Italian authorities, already implicates the Soviet Union in the attempted assassination of the pope. According to Kalb, the evidence shows that "the Russians hatched the plot against the pope as one desperate way of con-



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taining the crisis in Poland or, at a minimum, they knew about it and did nothing to stop it."

Indeed, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski have both said that the well-established Bulgarian connection of Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who shot the pope, leads directly to the Soviet Union and dictator Yuri Andropov, who was then head of the KGB. "It had to be the Soviets," Kissinger said. "The Bulgarians had no interest in coming after the pope."

In a letter to President Reagan, Rep. McDonald said, "In your most recent press conference, you were questioned about the KGB connection, but indicated that you had no more information on the attack against the pope than did newsmen in the audience. Frankly, one finds that hard to believe, given the resources of the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies."

"One must ask," he went on to say, "whether a deliberate attempt is being made at the highest levels of our government to suppress the KGB's involvement in the assassination attempt to preserve nonexistent 'detente,' arms control talks and trade. I sincerely hope and pray that this is not the case."

McDonald requested that the President order the CIA and the State Department to cooperate fully with Italian authorities in their investigation of the case. "Further," McDonald said, "I respectfully ask that you immediately tell the American people on nationwide television about the evidence compiled to date, regarding the KGB connection, and what steps the Administration is taking in retaliation against the Soviets."

McDonald has also asked that CIA Director William Casey respond to the charges of a cover-up and that Rep. Edward P. Boland (D.-Mass.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, schedule public hearings on the matter.

Responding to Kalb's charges, the State Department said, in part: "It is certainly not United States policy to discourage journalists or the Italian authorities from investigating this case."

But a number of stories published after the NBC report was aired strongly suggest that U.S. officials are downplaying the evidence, for the reasons that Kalb mentioned.

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The New York *Times* reported in a story by Henry Kamm that the CIA "remains skeptical" even about Bulgarian involvement in the plot. Kamm reported that Reagan Administration officials were not talking about the case publicly because of "growing White House interest in a possible summit meeting" between President Reagan and Soviet dictator Andropov.

The Los Angeles *Times*, in reporting that the CIA has whitewashed Bulgarian and Soviet responsibility for the attack on the pope, quoted one U.S. official as saying, "Reagan could never meet Andropov if it was proved unequivocally that the Bulgarians, and therefore the Soviet KGB, was behind the plot to kill the pope."

The *Wall Street Journal*, in a story by Gerald F. Seib, quoted an aide to Secretary of State George Shultz as saying, "The attitude around here, at least of responsible people, is shut up and let this thing unfold."

But those "responsible" people, critics fear, are waiting for the kind of "unequivocal" evidence that will never be uncovered. Michael Ledeen of the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies points out that "there's no Freedom of Information Act in the Soviet Union," so absolute proof is not available.

Reed Irvine of Accuracy in Media says the reaction of much of our media to the evidence of Soviet KGB involvement in the attempted assassination of the pope has been low-key, but "inadequate as the media reaction has been, it has been greater than that of our government."